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WHAT SHOULD A MAN WANT?

"Tell me now, what should a man want
But to sit alone sipping his cup of wine?
I should like to have visitors come to discuss philosophy
And not to have tax-collectors coming to collect taxes;
My three sons married into good families,
My five daughters provided with steady husbands;
Then I could jog through a happy five-score years,
Craving no Cloud-ascent, no Resurrection.

Wang Chi—Seventh Century

IN A JADE CUP

Business men boast of their skill and cunning
But in Philosophy they are like little children.
Bragging to each other of successful depredations,
They forget to consider the ultimate fate of the body.
What should they know of the Master of Dark Truth
Who saw the wide world in a jade cup,
By illumined conception got clear of Heaven and Earth,
On the chariot of Mutation entered the Gate of Immutability?

Ch'en Tzu-ang—Seventh Century

ON THE BIRTH OF A SON

Families when a child is born
Hope it will turn out intelligent.
I, through intelligence

Having wrecked my whole life,
Only hope that the baby will prove
Ignorant and stupid.
Then he'll be happy all his days
And grow into a Cabinet Minister.

Su Shih—Eleventh Century

THE PEDLAR OF SPELLS

An old man selling charms in a cranny of the town-wall.
He writes out spells to bless the silk-worms and spells to
protect the corn.

With the money he gets each day he only buys wine;
Nor does he worry when his legs wobble,
For he has a boy to lean on.

Lu Yu—Twelfth Century

ON SEEING SWALLOWS IN HIS PRISON-CELL

You laugh at my clumsiness in falling into the trap of
disaster.
I sigh at your thoughtlessness in entering my round window.
The falling leaves are blown and soaked by the east wind
and rain;
But you could have sheltered easily enough under the eaves
of any roof.

Wang Tzu-tuan—Thirteenth Century
Translated by Arthur Waley